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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

1 July 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Brig. General Donald D. Blackburn  
JCS/SACSA

Attached is our response to the request levied by General Wheeler for assistance in your planning of the Son Tay operation.

We will continue to contribute relevant information, as available, and are preparing responses to subsequent queries for a 6 July 1970 deadline.

We will, of course, be available to assist in any way that we can as your planning continues.

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George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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Distribution:

Orig. - Addressee (Hand carried by

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1 - VAS/RAC for Son Tay file

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: CIA Response to General Wheeler's Request

Probable Hanoi Reactions to the Proposed Son Tay Operation

1. We doubt that Hanoi would take any new dramatic external steps as a result of the launching of the prisoner rescue effort into Son Tay, whether the operation was successful or not. An upsurge in military action in South Vietnam would not likely be taken solely in retaliation for the Son Tay enterprise, although Communist propaganda might bill a previously planned effort as "punishment" for the operation. Should the state of the Paris negotiations continue to be roughly the same in October 1970, as it is now, it is also unlikely that they would break off the talks. However, in the event that progress at that time had been made in the negotiations in Paris -- or a meaningful communication had been established through another channel -- we would have to re-evaluate their probable reaction to the rescue attempt.

2. Less predictable are the reactions that the Communists might take against the remaining U.S. prisoners. They are a "bloody-minded" people and could be most severe. This severity could range from execution of any of the attack party that might be captured, but we do not feel that this would be extended to include prisoners themselves. Unquestionably intensified security and increased harshness of treatment could be expected to be applied to the remaining PWs in North Vietnam. Although for their own reasons they have been forthcoming in recent months in releasing names through the U.S. pacifist Committee of Liaison, it would seem unlikely that they would reverse themselves now by resurrecting the specter of a war crimes trial. The propaganda that Hanoi would generate would be, in a sense, predictable. But it would be difficult for them to rally world or U.S. pacifist support in support of reprisals against the remaining prisoners for the rescue action over which they clearly had no control.

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Launch Sites

3. Possible mission launch sites include four positions north of the Plain of Jars in north central Laos, which are now held by General Vang Pao's Meo guerrilla forces. The sites are listed below:

Site No.	Name and Location	Airstrip Size	Elevation	Number of Troops	No. of Refugees and Villagers
1. Site 32	Bouam Long UG 2686	1300'x75'	4,800'	914	7,142
2. Site 6	Phou Vieng UG 0789	760'x66'	3,300'	310	2,537
3. Site 50	Phu Cum II UH 0301	1,470'x130'	4,300	290	7,117
4. Site 50 A	Phu Cum/K UH 0400	1,600'x67'	3,800	80	in the area of both sites

4. Offensive military operations by PL/NVA forces in north Laos have resulted in the loss of seven more suitably located sites since 9 March 1970. Five of the sites shown on the attached map are Sites 184, 231, 201, 82 and 33. Site 219 (Ban Sopman) at UH 2303 and Site 278 (Nam Hang) at UH 1643 were lost on 9 and 13 March respectively, and are not shown on the map.

5. The best located friendly held site for launch is Site 32 at Bouam Long. A consideration which must be made in the utilization of this site is the enemy artillery threat. Enemy 105 artillery and mortar fire on Site 32 began on 19 March 1970 and continued with varying degrees of intensity until 18 May. Friendly forces have recaptured several outposts and firmly secured the site. No enemy artillery fire has been reported in the area in the past several weeks.

6. It is anticipated that the enemy will renew its attacks in the Bouam Long area at the end of the current rainy season in approximately September-October 1970. The enemy artillery in this area is not now positively located. Renewed enemy offensive operations in this area would probably include artillery support on Bouam Long. The situation will be followed closely and any use of or movement of artillery will be noted. It is anticipated that the four sites under consideration will be in friendly hands during the beginning of the 1970 dry season, i. e., September, October and November.

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7. It might, however, be preferable not to utilize the facilities at Bouam Long (Site 32), but rather seize and hold a former friendly site or suitable area closer to Son Tay. Some 45 days prior to the operation, our Station could be tasked with selecting three or four potential launch sites probably in the UG or UH grid squares, north of Route 7. Given proper aerial photo coverage coupled with detailed enemy order of battle analysis, sites could be selected which would allow for a minimum 4-5 day reaction time on the part of PL/NVA forces. Heliborne security and support forces could be put into many suitable sites in the area north of Route 7 before enemy forces can react. (Map attached)

#### Morale Impact on Remaining Prisoners

8. There is little question but what the occurrence of the operation itself, even if it achieves only very limited success, will have a major positive impact on the remaining prisoners. One of the most psychologically debilitating effects of prolonged imprisonment is the slow, insidious growth of the conviction that "nobody cares." The operation is almost certain to act as a powerful counter to this attitude, and its value is not likely to be negated if the remaining prisoners are required to pay an immediate price in the form of more stringent conditions.

9. The positive morale effects may be expected to diminish over time, and the expected Hanoi propaganda line -- that the operation has made things worse for you and further delayed your release -- is likely to have some impact as time goes by. Even so, the long range impact is judged to be positive.

10. From a morale standpoint, the only foreseeable conditions under which the operation could be counterproductive are: (1) if it is a total and ignominious failure, or (2) a majority of the prisoners are led to believe, prior to the operation, that release for a large number of prisoners is imminent -- in which case the argument that the operation has delayed release will be given credibility. Current intelligence gives no basis for believing that such expectations exist at the present time.

#### Equipment

11. On the basis of recent field tests in Laos, this Agency considers some 500 fire fight simulators in current inventory to be operational. These items perform for seven minutes each, are air droppable, and provide sounds of small arms, grenades and whistles. The suitability of these items for the operation planned would have to be tested and judged by appropriate authorities.

